

By ROBERT HILBURN

**R**ap music is not polite. It's a noisy 'n' crude attack on mainstream sensibilities that has even liberal-minded adults who were raised on the rebellious, outlaw beat of Little Richard and the Rolling Stones asking themselves, "What happened to real music?"

While these adults shudder at the sound of rap, however, the music is the pulse of a far wider urban hip-hop phenomenon—a glorious, multilayered celebration of spontaneous, street-ignited artistry that also includes break dancing, graffiti and video. Its energy and flash and style have moved into advertising, fashion, and—of course—the pop-music mainstream.

Sales of rap records to young fans—black and white—have become strong enough to even make the once-reluctant pop Establishment finally open its doors to the black street sound. The Grammy Awards introduced a rap category this year, and Billboard magazine followed suit with its own rap sales chart. MTV dishes up a weekly rap show, and critics toast the best rap with a fervor rarely seen since the arrival of new-wave rock in the late '70s.

One reason for the greater acceptance is the arrival of a new wave of rappers, such as D.J. Jazzy Jeff & the Fresh Prince. They're so wholesome they could be regulars on the Cosby show.

But even with this new-found acceptance and popularity, rap is still criticized by some who say that much of the music is socially irresponsible.

Nowhere is this outlaw rap more visible than in Los Angeles, where Compton's N.W.A. has become an explosive new force with tales of gang violence that make even some in the rap movement uneasy.

Pushing the imagery much further than anyone before them, N.W.A. feature sirens and gunshots as backdrops to their brutal and ugly X-rated tales of drug dealing, gangbanging and police confrontations. The group's first album, "Straight Outta Compton" has sold nearly 500,000 copies in just six weeks, while the solo album by N.W.A. leader Eazy-E, "Eazy-Duz-It," is nearing the 650,000 mark.

Ice-T, a pioneer of the Los Angeles movement who calls his management-production company Rhyme Pays, goes out of his way in interviews to warn against the gang life style. His records, he has said, show young rap fans the consequences of such actions. Ice-T wrote the title track for the controversial gang movie of last year, "Colors."

The defiant N.W.A., however, refuses to pass judgment or offer itself as a role model. The group's name echoes its bold, incendiary

nature: Niggers With Attitude. Sample line from N.W.A.'s "Gangsta Gangsta":

*Since I was a youth, I smoke weed out*

*Now, I'm the ----- that you read about.*

*Taking a life or two.*

*That's what the hell I do*

*If you don't like how I'm living, Well, ---- you.*

*This is a gang and I'm in it.*

Ice Cube, a 19-year-old who writes most of N.W.A.'s rhymes,

says the extreme language isn't just an attempt to shock. It is a reflection of N.W.A.'s world.

"We make these records for our people first," he said last week. "Words like *bitch* and *nigger* may be shocking for somebody who is white, but that's not why we use them. It's everyday language of people around my neighborhood. When they refer to a girl, they might say 'bitch' or when referring to a guy, they might say, 'that nigger over there.' It's not used by us the way [bigots] used

to use it."

About the group's social stance, Ice Cube (real name O'Shay Jackson) added, "People say our music inspires violence or whatever, but there has been violence since the beginning of time. I like my records to shake people up, make them think . . . see something in a new way.

"To me, films like 'Cry Freedom' and 'Mississippi Burning' are from the wrong point of view. Hollywood never shows it from the black person's point of view,

# RAP



Photo of Public Enemy's Chuck D by Douglas R. Burrows

## Striking Tales of Black Frustration and Pride Shake the Pop Mainstream

. . . Even in 'Colors,' they showed it from the police point of view instead of the gangbangers' point of view. Our stuff is more or less documentary. It's what we grew up with.

**P**eople think that kids are incapable of knowing what is right and what is wrong, but kids are smarter than the adults think they are. They don't have to listen to records to know what they should do."

Because of lyrics as explosive as N.W.A.'s, rap has split the pop community in ways that haven't been seen since punk arrived more than a decade ago.

For nearly a decade now, much of the media and the pop Establishment has been hoping that rap would simply fade away. But the music has proved resilient and has become a dynamic forum for the expression of black frustrations and aspirations.

Dr. John Oliver, professor of social policy and planning at Cal State Long Beach's School of Social Work, sees a connection between rap and the soul artists who sang of black pride themes in the '60s.

"The rappers have gone back to the way Sly and the Family Stone or Curtis Mayfield or Donny Hathaway spoke about social conditions in the late '60s and early '70s," he said. "They are not only rallying the young rap audience into doing something actively about social problems, but also expressing black [attitudes] to the larger community.

"One of the things that made it [attractive] to young people in the beginning was that it was a way of relieving some of the anxiety and stresses they felt about being rejected by society.

"A lot of the press early on was fairly negative, but the groups were pretty tenacious, and the criticism made them more committed to it. Instead of pushing people away, I think it pushed a generation of young people closer together by giving them something of their own."

**T**hough the commercial door was opened in 1986, when Run-D.M.C. and the Beastie Boys merged rock 'n' rap sensibilities and sold an estimated 7 million albums, the real breakthrough has occurred in the last six months.

At 2 million-plus, Tone Loc's playful "Wild Thing" is the big-  
*Please see Page 80*

### OTHER RAP STORIES

■ **COMPTON'S N.W.A.** Eazy-E and M. C. Ren say they're in it for the money. Page 80

■ **THE POLICE REACT** Most law enforcement officers don't view rap as a threat. Page 80

■ **ESSENTIAL RAP GUIDE** Ten albums that are happening now in rap. Page 81

# The Rap Reality: Truth and Money

Compton's N.W.A catches fire with stark portraits of ghetto life

By DENNIS HUNT

**E**azy-E was rapping about reality the other day, extolling the virtues of telling it like it is.

The young Compton rapper, who also runs the rap production company Ruthless Records, was lunching with his pal, writer/rapper M.C. Ren, at a Westside deli that's one of their favorite dining spots.

"Why do you think the fans like us—why they prefer our street raps over all that phony stuff out there?" asked Eazy-E, who has a hit album, "Eazy Duz It." He's also a member of the group N.W.A, whose "Straight Outta Compton" is one of the hottest rap albums around.

He answered his own question: "Because we're telling the real story of what it's like living in places like Compton. We're giving them reality. We're like reporters. We give them the truth.

People where we come from hear so many lies that the truth stands out like a sore thumb."

Eazy-E, an admitted ex-dope dealer whose real name is Eric Wright, is small, surprisingly shy and rather mellow. He certainly doesn't look tough. Neither does fellow N.W.A member M.C. Ren (Lorenzo Patterson), who's bigger and more talkative. (The other members of N.W.A are Ice Cube, Dr. Dre and Yella.)

Continued Eazy-E: "If you're from the streets, one of the fellas from the hood [neighborhood], and you hear us, you say, 'Yo, that's real.'"

"Listen to him," said M.C. Ren, who clearly idolizes Eazy-E. "Everybody else does. He's real, man, he's real."

Reality is in right now in West Coast rap, with Eazy-E, N.W.A and Ice-T leading the way. That means a stark, no-nonsense portrait of ghetto life, where gangs and dope pushers rule. (Critics



N.W.A's Eazy-E (with M.C. Ren): "It ain't about color, it's about color of money. I love that green."

are sharply divided over N.W.A's album. See Popmeter, Page 82.)

"What Jazzy Jeff and rappers like him talk about is phony stuff," charged M.C. Ren, referring to the maker of the cutesy "Parents Just Don't Understand."

"They're not into street raps, into telling what's really happening out there. They're talking about what the white world and the white kids can identify with. If you're a black kid from the

streets and somebody is rapping about parents not understanding, you'd laugh at that. You might not have parents or you'd have parents that were into crack or prostitution."

Against the odds, both albums have become hits: "Eazy-Duz-It" has sold nearly 650,000, and N.W.A's "Compton" is nearing sales of 500,000.

The rappers have received exposure mainly in clubs and sold

records largely by word-of-mouth. Now, though, they're going for the mainstream pop market by releasing versions of the albums in which the language is cleaned up.

Isn't this marketing strategy a compromise of their "reality" doctrine?

"It's just business," Eazy-E explained. "We want to sell more records. You can't put records in

Please see Page 87

## Police Don't Give Rappers Bad Rap

By STEVE HOCHMAN

**L**os Angeles area law enforcement officials are uncomfortable with some of the gangbanger sentiments expressed by N.W.A, but don't view the rap group as a threat. "It's not very welcome," said Lt. Joe Flores, adjutant to the Compton chief of police. "But it's a fad and I don't think it's going to have an adverse effect on the community...."

Representatives of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department familiar with the Compton and South-Central Los Angeles gang situation also saw little reason for concern.

"If you're attributing rap music to escalating gang activity, I haven't seen it," said Lt. Art Herrera of the Sheriff's Department gang unit.

However, Leon Watkins, head of a private agency that

works with parents of youths involved with drugs and gangs, believes the music is exploitative of a volatile situation and that "nothing good" can come from it.

"I don't condone that kind of thing," said Watkins, former regional director of the Los Angeles County Probation Department's youth gang services office and now head of his own South-Central Los Angeles Family Hotline. "The minds of our young people are too impressionable for groups to be coming out with stuff like that."

Watkins noted that he has been active in bringing such rap acts as Run-D.M.C. together with L.A. gang representatives to serve as positive role models. "Most of the rap groups I deal with are positive, anti-gang and anti-drugs. But N.W.A sounds like it's using the record industry to glamorize crime, and that's a hin-

drance...."

Still, Watkins accepts N.W.A's contention that it is just reporting what happens on the streets of Compton.

"What they're trying to do is sell records, and they're taking a situation that's already prevalent and using that frustration to sell records," Watkins said. "But when you put certain things to people who are already frustrated, that's what I worry about.... They've got a volatile situation and they're taking advantage of it."

And Watkins does not think songs such as "---- Tha Police" can serve as the spark to ignite the volatility into something bigger.

"The music won't touch off something violent," he said. "In my experience it's not the music, but something like a shooting that sets things off, and then the music becomes a battle cry later."

## Rap Music

Continued from Page 7

gest-selling single since "We Are the World" in 1985. The L.A. rapper's album is in the national Top 10 this week—one of more than two dozen rap albums to make the Billboard pop charts in recent months.

On the critical front, nine rap singles made the year's 25 best records list in a Village Voice survey of the nation's pop critics. Equally significantly, Public Enemy's political "It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back" was voted the album of the year by a huge margin.

This turnaround is especially dramatic because rap was first dismissed by white rock fans as the enemy—some strange bastard offspring of disco. Rock radio stations resisted it. Even critics outside New York sidestepped it, except for an occasional socially conscious record such as Grandmaster Flash's "The Message" in 1982 or Run-D.M.C.'s "It's Like That" in 1983.

Some observers still look at it with disdain.

Mike Ross, who produced and arranged Tone Loc's "Wild

Thing" with his partner Matt Dyke, considered rap's turnaround and said: "Every time a new phase of music comes along, people think it's just a quick trend because they don't identify with it. In this case, a lot of white people just saw rap as a bunch of black guys screaming. The music wasn't melodic or anything, and it was hard for a lot of people to relate to the songs."

"But rap isn't going to just go away. It's not just this year's disco. Disco got overexposed, and then the backlash came and boom, it was over.... Rap is evolving very quickly. The challenge is for the rap artists to keep changing, and there are signs now that they are capable of that change."

As Ross suggests, outsiders may say that rap all sounds the same, but there are distinct subdivisions—from the shocking street realism of Compton's Eazy-E and N.W.A to the socially minded activism of Public Enemy and Boogie Down Productions; from the girl rap vitality of Wee Papa Girls to the teen novelty of D.J. Jazzy Jeff; from the sexy strut of L.L. Cool J to the witty pop-culture salutes of De La Soul. Reflecting on the fast-

# The Essential Guide to Contemporary Rap

By DUFF MARLOWE

**F**at gold chains, expensive track suits and major-league egos—once the stereotypical trademarks of rap music—are rumbling in the face of a fresh influx of creative young rhy-mers whose styles are as varied as their birthplaces. They flaunt humor, intelligence and style without losing a step on the dance floor.

Here are 10 introductions to what's happening now in rap—in order of preference:

**De La Soul's "Three Feet High and Rising"** (Tommy Boy)—This Long Island trio launches its self-proclaimed "Daisy Age" with this madcap masterpiece. Throwing together samples of early '70s soul, imaginative dance-inducing drum beats and even Steely Dan riffs in a kind of psychedelic collage, rhy-mers Pos and Dove deliver smart, sometimes cryptic verses about everything from garden-ing to sex.

**The Jungle Brothers' "Straight Out the Jungle"** (Idlers)—From romance to racism, the JB's tell it like it is with a charismatic and suave funkiness. "Behind the Bush" is a lush,



Tone's "Loc-ed After Dark"

seductive groove that rivals Marvin Gaye's most persuasive efforts and "Black Is Black" discourses on black unity over a seriously funky soul beat.

**Tone Loc's "Loc-ed After Dark"** (Delicious Vinyl)—Imagine the shock in New York: The biggest-selling rap single ever (the irresistibly danceable "Wild Thing") comes out of Los Angeles. The follow-up, the equally infectious "Funky Cold Medina," is also rocketing up the charts.

**Boogie Down Productions' "By All Means Necessary"** (Jive/RCA)—BDP's Chris Parker, known as KRS-One "teaches but never preaches," with themes of positivity and non-violence. The single "Stop

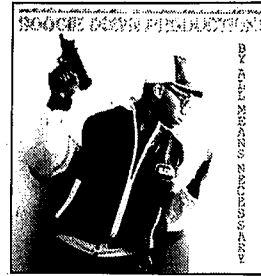
the Violence" initiated a new era of community involvement for fellow rappers, and rocked dance floors and airwaves throughout urban America, while "My Philosophy" lays down some South Bronx-style truths.

**Shinehead's "Unity"** (Elektra)—Shinehead was born in Jamaica and bred in the Bronx, personifying a newly emerging hip-hop style that blends Caribbean "toasting," an early '60s rap predecessor, with New York-style beats. "Who The Cap Fits" tips its hat to Bob Marley and "Unity" borrows a chorus section from the Beatles' "Come Together."

**Public Enemy's "It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back"** (Def Jam/Columbia)—



Jamaican-born Shinehead



BDP's Chris Parker

Public Enemy took the rap scene by storm with their radical political line and hard-driving beats. Selling hundreds of thousands of records with little or no radio airplay, rhymer Chuck D and sidekick Flavor Flav have their fingers on the pulse of urban youth, reflecting rage, rhythm and discontent.

**N.W.A's "Straight Outta Compton"** (Ruthless)—This five-man posse from Compton spins some shockingly intense tales of life in the "panic zone." Songs like "Gangsta Gangsta" and "Dopeman" may make parents squirm, but the group does present a steely-eyed vision of reality that's a blast to dance to.

**Eric B. & Rakim's "Follow**

**The Leader"** (Uni/MCA)—In terms of pure technique, all the rap world looks up to the smoothly sophisticated style of Rakim. This latest album finds the two at their best with superbly produced and performed selections like "Follow the Leader," "Lyrics of Fury," and "The R."

**Gang Starr's "No More Mr. Nice Guy"** (Wild Pitch)—The son of a municipal court judge, this New Yorker lays down the law for kids who see rap as "black America's radio station." Songs such as "Knowledge," "Positivity," and "Cause and Effect" are more concerned with educating and relating than with egos and bragging; using hot soul-flavored dance beats and infusions of jazz.

**The Wes Papa Girls' "The Beat, the Rhyme, the Noise"** (Jive/RCA)—The fashionable English duo pioneered the use of disco-style "house" music beats in rap with "Heat It Up" and also flaunt reggae, funk, and even acid styles. Producer Teddy Riley, who broke acts like Bobby Brown and Keith Sweat, produces the girls' rap version of the George Michael hit "Faith," which was a major hit overseas. Disco rap? Why not? □

changing scene, Ross added good-naturedly: "Rap records are kind of like Kleenex for the kids. They love the record or a sound for six months and then they reach back into the box."

**R**hythmic talking over a funk beat."

That's how David Toop describes rap music in "The Rap Attack" (South End Press), his colorful and comprehensive book on the origins of this '80s off-spring of such equally durable musical forms as the blues and doo-wop.

Pointing to 1979 as the start of rap as it is now known, Toop writes that the first rap records were "the tip of an iceberg—under the surface was a movement called hip-hop, a Bronx subculture, and beneath that was a vast expanse of sources reaching back to West Africa."

For Toop and other rap historians, the roots of the music stretch back through a long and surprisingly varied set of characters and movements. Toop's list includes more than two dozen cornerstones, from the lively boasts of Bo Diddley and Muhammad Ali to street groups and prison songs.

Unlike rock fans, who argue endlessly over the identity of the first true rock hit, rap fans generally point to a single record as the key beginning: the Sugarhill

Gang's "Rapper's Delight."

The novelty, released by New Jersey's Sugarhill Records in 1979, only made it to No. 36 on the

national charts, but it opened a door for other rappers in the Bronx.

Among those who stepped for-

ward was Joseph Saddler, whose turntable skills helped bring a new sophistication to rap. As a kid, Saddler—who latter dubbed

himself Grandmaster Flash—loved music, but records frustrated him. Rather than listen to them all the way through like everyone else, Saddler picked out the best parts and imagined how they would sound together.

By his mid-teens, he had begun to create his own records by plugging two turntables into the

■ **CRITICISM OF N.W.A**  
Letters on rap lyrics, Page 115.

same speaker and playing them for neighborhood kids in the park. This twin-turntable effect enabled him to switch from one record to the other: a 10-second bass line from a James Brown record, a 15-second drum explosion from a Chic single, and so forth.

Seeing the success of "Rapper's Delight," Flash and his allies in the Furious Five went to Sugarhill Records and released a landmark record in rap.

Hailed as 1982's single of the year by both The Times and the New York Times, "The Message" was a stark tale of ghetto alienation that demonstrated that rap was not simply an echo of the fluffy disco era. Sample lyrics: "It's like a jungle sometimes / It make me wonder / How I keep from going under."

Please see Page 86



Melle Mel, left, and Grandmaster Flash, 1983.



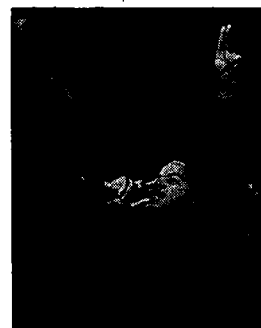
Run-D.M.C.'s Simmons and McDaniels in '85.



The Fresh Prince (Will Smith)



De La Soul



Ice Cube of N.W.A

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## Rap Music

Continued from Page 81

Grandmaster Flash and the other early rap heroes failed to step forward with consistent product or dynamic stage shows, however, and rap remained a rather limited black music experience until 1983, when two brothers from Queens entered the scene.

There are debates over who has been more important in furthering rap: Russell Simmons, who brought marketing and management skills to the virgin field, or his brother Joseph, who put together the first superstar rap act, Run-D.M.C.

Unlike many of the rap pioneers, they weren't from the Bronx or the ghetto. Raised in suburban Queens,

they were sons of a supervisor of attendance for the New York City school system.

Russell got into rap by producing live rap shows and eventually managing some of the better acts, including Kurtis Blow. Today, he runs Def Jam Records—whose acts have included Public Enemy, the Beastie Boys and L.L. Cool J—and Rush Management, which represents dozens of rap acts, including Run-D.M.C., Public Enemy, Slick Rick and De La Soul.

"There was a lot of resistance to rap in the record business in the beginning, but independent labels pushed for it because it was something they could build on," Russell said in 1986. "That's how most independents get started. . . . With things that major labels don't own or care about."

Joseph Simmons was such a natural rapper that he was opening shows promoted by his brother while still in his early teens. He eventually put on his own shows at the park near his house. While studying mortuary science in college, he wrote the song that became another early rap classic, "It's Like That." The record, which is in the social-realist tradition of "The Message," sold 500,000 and pushed Run-D.M.C. into the forefront of rap.

Not only did the trio make more consistent albums than their rap rivals, but Run-D.M.C. had a greater pop-rock sensibility than its contemporaries. Without sacrificing rap's black base, Run-D.M.C. reached out to a white audience that had previously ignored rap. The group also adopted a catchy, vaguely gangster-like image incorporating black hats and clothing. The idea wasn't to make people think they were gangsters. They just thought it looked cool.

Despite the trio's wholesome messages (down with drugs, up with education), the gangster image was picked up by the media when violence broke out at a few of

the group's shows and has remained a cloud over the rap industry.

When 41 fans were injured during an outbreak of gang violence at a Run-D.M.C. concert in 1986 at the Long Beach Arena, Joseph Simmons said gang violence had nothing to do with rap—that it was a symptom of larger problems in the city.

Meanwhile, Run-D.M.C.—with assistance from record producer and then Def Jam co-owner Rick Rubin—added a harder edge to its music. A remake of Aerosmith's "Walk This Way" broke through to the white rock market in a big way. The single—named record of the year by the Times and the Village Voice critics' poll—reached No. 4 on the pop charts and helped push the trio's "Raising Hell" album past the 4 million sales mark.

The Beastie Boys, also working with Rubin, made an even stronger move into the rock audience with their album "Licensed to Ill." The collection, which also has sold more than 4 million, combined all the styles that parents love to hate—punk, rap and heavy metal—in a rowdy and irreverent set of songs.

Influenced by the success of Run-D.M.C., dozens of other rap artists surfaced. Many headed for Simmons' Def Jam Records, while others—such as the five members of N.W.A.—started their own production companies.

Jerry Heller, a record-industry veteran who over the years has been involved with such acts as Elton John and the Electric Light Orchestra, now manages N.W.A. and Eazy-E, as well as more conventional black acts like Rose Royce.

"The remarkable thing about rap is that you can make a record for a few hundred dollars," Heller said recently at the Celebrity Theatre in Anaheim, where his two bands were part of a rap bill that sold out two shows at the 2,500-seat hall.

"What that means is that you can just throw it away and try something else if it doesn't turn out right. It encourages you to try new

sounds and experiment. It's not like it is at the major labels where you end up spending so much making the record, you have to put it out even if it doesn't sound any good."

In the explosion of the late '80s, rap sections of record stores have become showcases of records by strange-sounding new groups and labels.

Increasingly, however, major labels have begun to show up on the rap charts.

Simmons' Def Jam—distributed by Columbia Records—continues to be the most significant label. Its acts range from De La Soul, whose debut album features so many delightful pop-culture escapades that it may well be the "Sgt. Pepper" of rap, to Public Enemy, whose leader Chuck D has been hailed as the Bob Marley of rap.

Though its language can be as forceful at times as N.W.A.'s, Public Enemy's music has a political rather than gangbanger emphasis. The idea isn't so much to reflect life on the streets but to raise social awareness and build a renewed sense of black determination and pride.

Public Enemy's politically charged "Yo! Bum Rush the Show" album in 1987 arrived like an electric jolt. Its aggressive tales of black activism were accompanied by a stage act in which the group's aides paraded around with imitation Uzis.

When one song urged listeners to pay attention to controversial Black Muslim minister Louis Farrakhan and another seemed to condone attacks on police, there were concerns about possible anti-Semitism and irresponsibility.

Like Run-D.M.C., Public Enemy leader Chuck D (real name Carlton Ridenhour) comes from a middle-class background in the New York suburbs. During his teens, his parents sent him to a study program where some of the teachers were former Black Panther Party members. The program stressed an intense examination of black culture.

While advocating greater black

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4/10	<b>SUN RA &amp; HIS INTERMEDIATE ARKSTRA A TRIBUTE TO WALT DISNEY</b>
4/14	<b>THE BEAT FARMERS</b>
4/15	<b>THE MOBERLYS GENTLEMAN AFTER DARK • ONE DAY</b>
4/21	<b>ROSIE FLORES</b>
4/23	<b>ROOMFULL OF BLUES</b>
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unity, Chuck D made it clear in interviews after the release of the album that he wasn't urging racial separation or advocating violence.

About "It Takes a Nation of Millions," Chuck D said, "I wanted to put together a classic album so that years from now it would be looked at the way Marvin Gaye's 'What's Going On' or 'Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band' are viewed today."

"I think we are going to see more of that ambition because rappers are discovering what it takes to make a really good album. Before, all their attention was just into getting a record out there. There were so many things working against you. . . . The radio, the record companies."

Asked if he thinks of himself more as a record maker or as a social commentator, Chuck D sighed, then said:

"It's important that we educate our people as well as entertain them. We have to walk that line, not just to our people, but people in general. . . . tell others how the black person feels about his situation in America or in the Western world."

"That's one reason there is so much confusion over rap. White audiences think they are familiar with the black experience, but they aren't. That's why they find the language and symbols sometimes shocking."

"When I said *Uzis* on the first album, I was talking about the power of words, but if I had said *words*, nobody would have thought twice about it. That gave us a chance to show them what we were talking about."

One of the challenges, he said, is writing songs that speak equally to black and white audiences.

"To me, that's one of the most exciting things about what's happening in rap." □

## N.W.A

*Continued from Page 80*

places like K mart and Target if they have explicit lyrics.

"Also, a lot of little kids like our music but their parents won't let them have records with the cussing on it. And with all the cussing, the records won't get played on the radio. So we have a clean version for that. Cussing ain't for everybody. They want clean versions, so that's what we'll give them."

Eazy-E says that criminal activities such as dope dealing, car theft, burglary bankrolled his entry into the record business.

"It was getting too dangerous," he said. "I decided to look for something legal to do with the money I'd made."

In late 1986 he started Ruthless Records, a production company that signs artists and releases their records through various labels. His solo efforts and N.W.A's records are put out by Priority Records, while Ruthless's other prize act,

female rap trio JJ Fad, is with Atco Records. Ruthless's other artists are Bobby Jimmy & the Critters, who are with Priority, and Michele Le, on Atco.

Eazy-E was turned on to rap by hanging out at a Compton club with his rapper buddies. Originally, he planned to be strictly a background figure.

"I wanted to help out rap groups and get in on the business part of the rap scene," he said. "But a couple of the acts we wanted backed out, so I decided to try rapping myself—even though I had never done it."

But love of rapping isn't the primary reason he's in this business.

"We're not making records for the fun of it; we're in it to make money," Eazy-E said.

Both the Eazy-E and N.W.A albums feature some hard-core swearing.

In defense of their seamy street language, Eazy-E said: "If you want to get your point across, you gotta cuss."

X-rated street raps, M.C. Ren added, are very macho. "When you're riding around with the fellas, you want to listen to something real masculine, like 'Boyz-in-the-Hood.' How would it look riding around and listening to something wimpy like 'I Need Love' or that phony stuff Jazzy Jeff does? Street raps have to be masculine."

Women come in for their share of abuse in the raps. Particularly on the N.W.A album, women are portrayed as the enemy, as sex objects who are selfish, vain and money hungry. Both Eazy-E and M.C. Ren skirted the sexism issue, claiming they're not judging women but merely reflecting prevalent ghetto attitudes.

"We're not putting down women," Eazy-E said. "It's just street talk. Women understand that."

They like us. They buy our records. They don't think of us as bad guys. . . . That's just how you talk about women."

Although they're against anti-drug messages, they don't advocate drug use. "In our raps, we don't tell people not to use drugs," M.C. Ren said. "They're gonna do it anyway, whether you tell them or not. People certainly won't stop because they hear something on a record. The kids would just laugh at that stuff."

Added Eazy-E: "It all goes back to that bottom line—reality. The kids from the streets don't want preaching or messages. They want what they can identify with. They want to hear about the reality of their situation, not fairy tales. They don't care if it's ugly, they just want reality." □

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## Color in the Airwaves

Re "Black Radio Debates the Inclusion of White Artists" (Dennis Hunt, March 26):

Stations that play only "black" or "white" music are cutting short not only themselves but also their audiences. Perhaps radio is comfortable rolling around in its own form of apartheid.

**Laura S. Underwood**  
Los Angeles

The black execs interviewed sound as if they would be very happy if all blacks sang like James Brown and all whites sang like Andy Williams.

**Lee Rogers**  
Santa Ana

I'm a white male. Never have I packed R&B into a "black only" category nor have I put pop, country, rock or other music into a "white" category. It scares me that such marketing "tunnel vision" exists in the music industry.

**Shawn Goodman**  
Rowland Heights

I don't care whether you are a black or a white performer—if you don't fit into a station's format, you shouldn't expect to be played on that station.

Stations, play what you like, black, white, yellow or red. But remember: As long as you know the difference between these colors, you will be prejudiced.

**Allan M. Rutenberg**  
Reseda

George Michael does not sound black—he sounds good, and with a black music base behind him, he sounds even better. Sheena Easton does not sound black. Her voice is white, her music black.

Black people like good music, especially good party music, regardless of the race of the artist.

But being black myself, I am disturbed by the way blacks are reacting. If black artists can seek white listeners (blacks often feel they are not successful until the white folks like them), why can't white artists seek black listeners?

**Rosemary C. Watson**  
Los Angeles



**Blue-eyed soul: George Michael, an R&B favorite at the American Music Awards.**

Hunt's article suggests that blacks in the industry resent performers such as George Michael, Madonna and Samantha Fox because they're white. I resent them because they're terrible. I'm white and I love Chuck Berry, Little Richard, Jimi Hendrix, Joan Armatrading, Living Colour and Tracy Chapman—because of their music and I couldn't care less what color they are.

Blacks who hate the fact that there are whites who like to dance as much as they do are as stupid as whites who are against Chapman being No. 1 in what has been predominantly a white field, acoustic folk.

**Thomas Foley**  
Northridge

## Hiroshima's Side

In response to Bill Shinkai's March 26 letter: He alleges "Taper paternalism toward Asian-Americans." That has not been our experience during the devel-

opment of the stage production "Sansei." The Taper's Gordon Davidson has given us tremendous support without tampering with the integrity of the piece.

Secondly, "Sansei" is based on the lives of four members of the Hiroshima band, with the text culled from taped interviews and discussions that were edited (not written as Shinkai assumes) by Bob Egan and Taper staffers.

Hiroshima has had right of approval on all matters regarding "Sansei" and its presentation.

As far as "trivializing the Sansei experience," I can't apologize for our lives.

**Dan Kuramoto**  
Los Angeles

## In the Dark

Concerning Nikki Finke's March 26 article on TV producer Aaron Spelling: I was amused by Spelling's ramblings. And I have never seen a truer statement than Spelling's quote, "I can honestly say that I don't know what the networks want anymore."

**Jeff Ames**  
Malibu

## Ticket Test

Here's an idea that could ensure fair and honest ticket sales for "Phantom of the Opera."

Demand that every person in line for tickets recite the lyrics of one song from the show for every ticket he wishes to purchase. This will not only ensure that those in line are truly fans of the "Phantom" but will undoubtedly guarantee that no one person will walk away with more tickets than he deserves!

**Jeanne Hart**  
Los Angeles

## Man Ray's Numbers

William Wilson's March 19 review of the Man Ray exhibition at MOCA describes by numerical importance the artist's work. It states that "The Lovers" is Man Ray's best painting, his second-best painting is "The Rope Dancer Accompanies Herself With Her

when I'm in a disco and a Madonna tune comes on, I want to dance. After all, isn't that the point?

**Frederic Cooper**  
Torrance

Madonna beat the pavement, searched for a backer, came up with an idea and got her songs heard. For being a true trend setter and having the wherewithal to make her own way, she deserves all of the accolades she is now enjoying.

**Arlene Greene**  
Beverly Hills

Really! All this fuss over Madonna. I find her no more objectionable than any of the other airheaded, pretentious pop stars of today (Michael Jackson, George Michael, etc.).

I don't know what the woman is like personally, but I do know that

## Rapping N.W.A.'s Vision of the Inner City

Dennis Hunt, in his March 19 Record Rack item, suggests that N.W.A.'s rap songs reveal the grimness of inner-city life without "prissy moralizing" and that N.W.A.'s contempt for the black woman cannot be abhorred because inner-city life has to be judged by a different set of rules.

I am disgusted by this patronizing attitude.

Maybe Mr. Hunt ought to buy KRS-1's "Self Destruction" and listen to the "prissy moralizing" of young rappers agonizing over the senseless violence afflicting inner-city communities across the nation and then pass this information on to Easy-E and the rest of N.W.A.

**Jervy Tervalon**  
Pasadena

The fallacy in Dennis Hunt's review of N.W.A.'s "Straight Outta Compton" is a dangerous one that lies close to the root of racism in the media.

This record clearly does not represent "the reality of the black ghetto" and Hunt's characterization of it as such is just another insult to the decent, hard-working citizens of those communities.

The record is, in fact, brutally sexist by "mainstream rules" or any other, and sexism is no more a fact of life in "the ghetto subculture" than in any other.

Chalk up one more for the media's attempt to dehumanize the perception of the black communities of L.A.

**Alan Dixon**  
Altadena

Shadows" and the third-best painting is of the Marquis de Sade.

Could Mr. Wilson educate me as to what are the sixth-best and fourteenth-best paintings in the Man Ray exhibit?

**Scott Berg**  
Los Angeles

## Kiss Off, Critics

Re Chris Willman's review of the first House of Lords video, "I Wanna Be Loved" (March 12): I take it that Chris' 0 rating means he didn't like the video much.

Well, his comments simply help fuel the fire. You see, in rock 'n' roll, critics don't count, never have and never will.

Maybe the reason critics hate House of Lords and love Elvis Costello (whose video won a 97 from Willman), is that most critics look like Elvis Costello.

If I had a dime for every knucklehead who sat behind a typewriter and told the world how my stuff would never amount to anything, I'd be a millionaire many times over. Wait a minute... I am a millionaire many times over. I guess I owe Chris and his kind a debt.

**Gene Simmons**  
New York

*Simmons, a member of the rock group Kiss, owns Simmons Records, home of the House of Lords.*

## Pacific Asia Museum

I do not understand how Calendar could devote a section to "Arts and Culture in the Pacific Rim" (March 19) and not mention Pacific Asia Museum.

Pacific Asia Museum was

opened in 1970 and has over the years been recognized by professionals and collectors as a major showplace for Asian art and artifacts—the only museum in the Pacific Southwest devoted exclusively to furthering the understanding among all the people of Asia and the United States through the arts.

Right now there is an extraordinary exhibit of contemporary woodblock prints by one of Japan's leading artists, Tsuruya Kokei, the official artist for the Grand Kabuki Theater.

Pacific Asia Museum is a valuable cultural treasure in this city. We believe it merits the attention and concern of The Times.

**Bruce S. Ross**  
President, Board of Trustees  
Pacific Asia Museum

## For the Record

In Kristine McKenna's March 19 article on the L.A. associates of artist Man Ray, several facts concerning James B. Brynes were misstated or omitted.

Brynes was curator of modern and contemporary art in the art division of the Los Angeles County Museum of History, Science and Art from 1946 through 1953.

In addition, a caption beneath a picture of Brynes on Page 105 should have identified a background painting as being the work of Hirman Williams and a chess set in the foreground as being a 1946 creation of Ray.

Letters should be brief and must include the writer's name, address and phone number. No pseudonyms may be used. Letters are subject to editing and condensation. Mention date of publication when referring to a specific article. Mail to Calendar Letters, Los Angeles Times, Times Mirror Square, Los Angeles 90053.

## And Now, the Good Word About Madonna

"Lewd behavior?" "Self-absorption?" "Marginally voiced?" "Screwed up?" These are the words used against Madonna by judge-and-jury letters writers (March 26). The word that comes to my mind is *jealousy*.

Madonna is beautiful, talented and laughing all the way to the bank. When was the last time Pepsi offered you \$5 million?

**Joyce Yovannone**  
Woodland Hills

Madonna has done many AIDS benefits and even enclosed a flyer

on AIDS in her album covers. There is a lot more depth to her than many people realize. I am proud to be "living in the Madonna moment."

**Marcia DelVecchio**  
Los Angeles

Really! All this fuss over Madonna. I find her no more objectionable than any of the other airheaded, pretentious pop stars of today (Michael Jackson, George Michael, etc.).

I don't know what the woman is like personally, but I do know that